

Australian Book Review

December 2002/January 2003, No. 247

ISSN 01 55-2864

Registered by Australia Post

Published by Australian Book Review Inc.

PO Box 2320, Richmond South, Victoria 3121

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ABR is most grateful for the generous support of our chief sponsor, La Trobe University.



ABR has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body; Holding Redlich; and Arts Victoria. We also acknowledge the generous support of our national sponsor, the National Library of Australia.



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Barry Humphries — author, satirist, actor, and artist — was born in Melbourne in 1934. His memorable characters include Dame Edna Everage, cultural ambassador Sir Les Patterson, union official Lance Boyle, and perhaps his most sympathetic character, mild, suburban-mannered Sandy Stone. In film, Humphries acted in *The Getting of Wisdom*, and co-wrote the scripts for the two Barry McKenzie films based on his comic strip character. His second volume of autobiography, *My Life As Me: A Memoir*, is reviewed in this issue. The National Library holds Humphries material (including posters, programmes and newspaper cuttings) in its theatre-related Prompt Collection. There is also a 1981 interview, and several recorded addresses, held in the Oral History Collection. Mark Strizic took our cover photograph of Humphries in 1968. Born in Berlin, Strizic migrated to Australia



from the former Yugoslavia in 1950. With no formal training, he has developed a strong reputation for architectural and industrial photography, and for his striking portraiture. He collaborated with architect Robin Boyd to produce the book *Living in Australia* (1970), and is also known for his multimedia mural work. The National Library holds a representative selection of Strizic's photographs, mainly depicting Melbourne and country Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s, along with some powerful portraits of notable Australians, including artists Charles Blackman, Clifton Pugh and John Perceval.

Mark Strizic

Portrait of Barry Humphries, 1968

Photograph: gelatin silver; 14.5 x 22 cm

Pictures Collection, an12153396

National Library of Australia

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Letters

ABR welcomes concise and pertinent letters. Correspondents should note that letters may be edited. They must reach us by the middle of the current month. Letters and e-mails must include a telephone number for verification.

Not half as nice

Dear Editor,

Nothing jolts a writer like finding that her book has been read in serious discord with her intentions, and produced the last effect she'd have wanted. Heather Neilson (*ABR*, October 2002) thinks I'm 'preaching' and condemning to outer darkness those who don't agree with me. This is disquieting, but also salutary. However other reviewers may differ — and they do — Dr Neilson has a right to her own reading of *How Simone de Beauvoir Died in Australia*. I'm sorry she found no pleasure in my book; but, acknowledging her seriousness, I respond to the question she raises twice in the course of the review: for whom was it intended? The answer is: for any and every reader, not only academics, for whom the shifts and struggles of the liberal conscience are never finished with, and for whom such struggles, as they are lived out, make stories worth telling. It's also for those who share the sense that carrying Australian nationality is now a more complicated and troublesome business than we once supposed — not half as nice, in fact. In that framework, I've proposed that the legacies of writers such as Beauvoir and Raymond Williams have important things to offer, and tried to explore how. Since the questions raised by their and others' works are left alive but unresolved, there's no 'preaching' to the 'converted' or anyone else. Ethical exploration isn't preaching; the speaking position isn't from a rostrum or pulpit, but from within argumentative milieux that are both divided in the present, and shifting over time. I think this is made clear, particularly from the elements of memoir in the book.

Neilson, however, seems to want the essayist/storyteller to stay fixed in a particular place. At that rate, not surprisingly, she misreads, and sometimes seems not to have read at all. I'm not 'scornful' of 'white liberal guilt' (a most useful emotion, in fact), nor do I apologise, as she claims, for sharing the 'accidental privilege and safety' (my phrase) of those who watched events in East Timor in late 1999 from south-eastern Australia. In the title piece, one of my characters — a very young woman, just finding out what kind of world she's in — is shocked into tears by images from the days of massacre after the independence ballot. Neilson sees this as reprehensible 'self-indulgence', and finds me guilty of endorsing it.

Where I've cited film images of the millionaire yachtsman during the bicentenary, she accuses me of 'bitter stereotyping'. She ignores the context, in which Pat Fiske's panorama documentary on the big day, *Australia Daze*, is drawn into relation with Raymond Williams's argument on the way 'the politics of short-term advantage' took over in the 1980s. Despite the rich man's egregious comments on the Aboriginal march, he's viewed with good humour; he's literally part of the whole picture, which allows us to consider what can and can't be seen from positions of special advantage. If this was 'bitter stereotyping' of complacent millionaires, what could be said of the tales emerging from the HIH Royal Commission?

Commenting on the introductory essay, which considers the 2000 Olympics among other things, Neilson deplors what she

terms 'the ongoing national salvation' over Cathy Freeman, and implies that I've shared in it. What I don't share is Neilson's contempt for public opinion. As I suggest in the essay, the wave of emotion at Freeman's win was less exhilaration than relief. Something quite serious was going on, and it should be credited; that is, a step in the long process whereby majority Australia is coming to terms with its real history. Those ceremonial moments were points along the way; they gained intensity, paradoxically enough, because of the Howard government's recalcitrance.

To return to Neilson's main question: the book was meant for serious entertainment, as well as story and critique. She wasn't entertained and, where others have found optimism in my view of the nation and the time, she sees frustration as predominant. There can always be both; but that's for my readers to discover, not for me to prescribe.

Sylvia Lawson, Newtown, NSW

Thinking about evil

Dear Editor,

In her otherwise perceptive and engaging essay 'Homer and the Holocaust' (*ABR*, November 2002), Andrea Goldsmith seems to me in a muddle concerning what she refers to as 'identification' in modern fiction. One of the great achievements of the psychologically realist novel has been to allow us inside the heads of not only those characters who are like us, but also those who are not like us. When I read Robert Fagle's translation of the *Iliad* some years back, I had a similar reaction to that described by Ms Goldsmith: 'wrenched into a world where men are not as I know them and the gods are terrifying.' She continues a little later, 'In the *Iliad*, because I did not, could not, identify with the characters and the events, the texture of those foreign characters and times was starkly and painfully illuminated', and talks of the poem dealing with 'a situation that is outside experience', invoking an ill-defined objective interpretative approach, similar to Brecht's theory of theatre of alienation, to help us comprehend war of mass slaughter. 'Real terror,' she claims, 'operates within an alien consciousness.' I feel this is all wrong-headed.

The Achaeans and the Nazis were not aliens, they were human beings, in some ways, probably in many ways, just like us. Even though the mode of expression of the *Iliad* might not encourage it, I believe that what is required here of the reader is an act of imaginative empathy, not only that we might understand the plight of the victims (that is not so difficult), but so that we might understand the motivations of the perpetrators. 'Evil' is not some abstract entity, but a description of particular deeds committed by men and women. If we wish to understand why these deeds occur, we need to understand why these individuals act. And the modern novel can help us here: Dostoevsky, particularly, comes to mind. Surely, only when armed with such understanding might we be in a position to recognise and perhaps forestall or prevent further evil.

Leigh Swinbourne, Bellerive, TAS

University vision

Dear Editor,

Phillipa McGuinness's letter in the September issue of *ABR* reflects the quandaries in academic publishing viewed from a particular perspective. Many issues arise from this letter that go to the heart of scholarly communication. What is the role of a university press in the twenty-first century? Is there a future for a university press in traditional terms? McGuinness states: 'encouragingly university presses are publishing more general books not always written by academics.' Is this what their mission should be? Many university presses around the world are losing money or just breaking even, and are resorting to a variety of strategies: asking for increasing authorial subsidies and the relinquishing of royalties, and publishing general books. This year, the University of North Carolina Press's budget was saved by the publication of *Mama Dips Kitchen*. Is this what we want from our university presses?

In addition, prices are tending to rise, particularly for overseas academic monographs sold in Australia. Libraries are facing a major crisis in this area, which exacerbates the problem. The average sale of a social science/humanities monograph is 250 copies worldwide, with X being remaindered. Stanford University Press announced last month that it is laying off its humanities editor and cutting its humanities titles.

The present situation is unsustainable if we are trying to make available the scholarly output of our universities. Perhaps we need to consider radically new approaches, such as the development of institutional repositories building upon the growing global practice of posting research online. Digital publishing technologies, linked to global networking, international interoperability protocols and metadata standards, allow for branded institution output, in an electronic environment.

This is one of many such e-scholarship initiatives around the world that provide peer review and are made available electronically, usually free of charge as a public good of the university, or at realistic prices. The new Oxford Scholarship Online project, which OUP will release in September 2003, is an example, with searchable digitised texts of 250 titles in each discipline.

The academic community is under more pressure than ever from the publish or perish syndrome, even though Linda Butler from the ANU has clearly shown in *Nature* that 'a list of published papers is no measure of value'. The research formula for publications applied by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), apparently at the behest of the Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee, is essentially quantitative rather than qualitative. A recent UK study by the Association of Learned and Society Publishers has shown that the major reason for publication by academics is to communicate their research, especially in branded outlets. Only one per cent looked for financial returns. Nonetheless, the academic as reader and the academic as author, as librarians have learned from the scientific publishing world, can be very Jekyll and Hyde.

If communication to the peer groups is the key issue, we are then returning to a different concept than cited by McGuinness. This is reflected in the development of e-presses, which are cur-

rently under discussion at Monash, ANU and Sydney Universities and were a significant backdrop to the search for the MUP Director, which Louise Adler has now filled. The institutional repository movement, which ranges from pre-prints to digital theses to peer-reviewed electronic monographs, allows access to far more material than a small number of monographs produced in traditional ways on an annual basis by a declining number of university presses.

Rather than waste time trying to transform theses into 'readable books', why not allow them to stay as digital theses available to the world at the point of creation? The fact that DEST and the Australian Research Council (ARC) have recognised the importance of the Australian Digital Theses Project, based at the University of NSW, reflects this emerging trend. In the UK, the concept of UK Theses has now been accepted as a general generic database to be developed. The problem of publishing for the young scholar is something that is being addressed within the UK Humanities Research Council and could be investigated by the ARC here.

There are many major issues here that need extensive discussion. We are now clearly facing a watershed for the future dissemination of academic information, traditionally encapsulated in monographs, in the social sciences and humanities in Australia. It is clear that global trends need to be reflected within the Australian context, and it is refreshing that several Australian universities have begun to address the issues with a new vision.

At the time of writing, a projected major seminar on the Future of the Academic Book in Australia, under the leadership of the Australian Academy of Humanities, the Australian Academy of Social Sciences and the National Scholarly Communications Forum, will be held in Sydney at the National Maritime Museum on 7–8 March 2003. Details will be made available through *ABR*, as well as other outlets.

Colin Steele, ANU, Canberra, ACT

Flaws in the Freedom Ride

Dear Editor,

Two errors crept into the background information to the National Library of Australia's archival photograph that was used on the front cover of your October issue. Firstly, the university students' 'Freedom ride' was in early 1965, not 1964. This is a curious error, given that a review of Ann Curthoys's book *Freedom Ride* — a regrettably ungenerous one — appeared only nine pages later and the information was thus readily to hand for checking. Secondly, the article stated: 'In 1965, Perkins became the first Aboriginal graduate of an Australian university.' The database of the Sydney University archives provides the information that his year of graduation was 1966, the same year that Margaret Valadian graduated in Social Work from the University of Queensland. It would be futile to quibble about which graduation ceremony preceded the other, and by how many days: each of them was an important milestone. But Dr Perkins's more public later career should not obscure Dr Valadian's achievement, especially because, as an undergraduate, she, too, had an important influence on her fellow students.

J.J. Carmody, Roseville, NSW

Italian labours of love

Dear Editor,

ABR has recently commented on Australian cultural studies in Europe, through a review by Sylvia Lawson of the proceedings of an Australian Studies conference at the University of Toulouse, and Heather Neilson's Copenhagen 'Diary' describing the biennial conference of the European Association of Commonwealth Literary and Language Studies. Other products of these associations include publications on Australian culture by European scholars. The latest is a volume of Vance Palmer's writings, *Vance Palmer: The Brand of the Wild and Other Sketches* (2002), edited by Angelo Righetti, Head of the English Department at the University of Verona, and elegantly published by that university. Because of the nature of the series in which it appears, the book cannot be offered for sale, but Professor Righetti would like to donate copies to interested Australian libraries. The purpose of this letter is to alert *ABR* readers to the publication. It reprints some early, hitherto untraced Palmer sketches and a novella, his first substantial effort as a novelist. These appeared in a popular London magazine, *The Sunday Chronicle*. Righetti makes no substantial claims for these works, but they do add to the record of an important writer. A modest scholar, Righetti researched this publication in London as a labour of love for Australian literature. While the texts are reproduced in English, he has written the Introduction in Italian in the interests of his students and as a link between the two cultures.

Laurie Hergenhan, Brisbane, Qld

A response to Molly Bloom

Dear Editor,

Molly Bloom (from Bronte? — it sounds too good to be true) is of course within her rights to take pleasure in Michael Sharkey's *History* — or, indeed, in John Foulcher's *The Learning Curve* or Graeme Hetherington's *Life Given* — as she is within her rights to deplore my recent review of them (Letters, *ABR*, November 2002). But why, I ask, is it necessary to accuse me of 'self-aggrandisement'? Since she gives no evidence of this, no clue as to what she means (there is a sort of dismissive précis of various points I make), I can only assume that she means to imply dishonesty on my part: to say, in effect, that I *did* like the books, or liked them more than I said I did, but decided for reasons of self-publicity to write a review dispraising them. This is not the case. I *didn't* like any of the books on offer, and my review was an entirely honest attempt to say why this was so. I'm sorry if she found it 'turgid'. I'm not sorry she disagrees with me.

Incidentally, I didn't take a 'pot-shot' at Robert Gray; I expressed my disagreement with him.

Richard King, White Gum Valley, WA

Allen & Unwin tells us that **David Marr** and **Marian Wilkinson's** much-anticipated book about the *Tampa* Affair has been postponed until February 2003. The title is now *Dark Victory: The Military Campaign to Re-elect the Prime Minister*.

Amanda Lohrey is also in the news. Her study of the Greens and their leader, **Bob Brown**, has just appeared as the latest 'Quarterly Essay' (*Groundswell: The Rise of the Greens*). Meanwhile, the Montpellier and Vulgar Presses have reissued her 1984 novel, *The Morality of Gentlemen*, along with **Jean Devanny's** *Sugar Heaven* (1936). **Delys Bird** reviews the latter novel, along with several reissues, on page 61.

If you have a short story or prose piece ranging from 1000 to 8000 words in your drawer, you might like to enter the Eleventh Annual Tom Howard Short Story Contest. Full details appear on page 42.

Our first year of *ABR* Forums will end, fittingly, with a conversation about one of the year's most talked-about publications: **Barry Hill's** *Broken Song* (which **Frances Devlin-Glass** reviews elsewhere in this issue). The author will be in conversation with **Robert Manne** at 6.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 11 December. As usual, this Forum will take place at fortyfivedownstairs (45 Flinders Lane, Melbourne), in association with the Mietta Foundation. The cost is \$10 (\$8 for *ABR* subscribers and concessions). Bookings are essential, via Readings in Carlton (03 9347 6633).

Lovers of the great Greek Alexandrian poet **C.P. Cavafy** may be interested in an evening of talks and readings to celebrate Cavafy. Organised by Professor **Stathis Gauntlett** of La Trobe University, this will take place at that university's Melbourne campus (215 Franklin Street) at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, 10 December. **Dorothy Porter** and **Peter Rose** will be among the speakers.

Due to rising costs, *ABR* subscription rates will increase on 1 February, the first such rise in eighteen months — all the more reason to subscribe soon if you don't do so already. You will find our flyer inserted in the magazine. Current subscribers wishing to give away a gift subscription to a friend are entitled to a special discount of 10% before 1 February. To qualify for this special offer, they should complete the flyer and add their subscriber number or details.

Next year — with another busy editorial programme, new features and many events — *ABR* will be looking for more volunteers to assist us in all aspects of the magazine. *ABR* volunteers seem to enjoy the experience, and quite a few of them have found it not professionally disadvantageous. Interested readers should contact the Editor by mail or e-mail.

Finally, *ABR* sends its best wishes to our readers, subscribers, contributors, volunteers, sponsors and advertisers. We are grateful for your ringing support in 2002, and look forward to bringing you the first of our 2003 issues in February.

